click, and rewind

By: rumiberri

What she always wanted, was a soft lullaby whispered into her ear. An affirmation that no matter what, things would be okay. Sometimes, she wonders if it's already too little, too late. But, Madoka is Madoka, and she finds that she is also still the same. [AU] [Homura centric]

/The amazing thing about your ability, Akemi Homura, is that for every reset, the world you step into, is not the same as the previous/

Homura narrows her eyes. "...What do you mean?"

Kyuubey swishes his tail. /It is exactly as I say. Your powers are not exactly of time manipulation, but the ability to travel between parallel worlds. Your wish was to save Kaname Madoka, was it not?/

Homura grits her teeth. The only thing stopping her from shooting him is her bleeding side and her broken arm.

"...I can still save her."

/You cannot. At least, not in this world. Kaname Madoka has already made her wish. Even if time were to reset to the past, once you reach the same point, she will repeat the same wish. Her fate in this world is already sealed/

Homura slams her hand into the ground, ignoring how it sends a jolt of pain through her injured body. "Then I'll save her in the next world!"

Kyuubey turns to her, head tilted. /I wonder though, Akemi Homura, what your exact wish was? The affects of crossing worlds is unpredictable. Just as Kaname Madoka's own potential grows as you jump worlds, things about you as well, are changing/

Homura can feel the sands trickling down, and she knows it's not long until that small window when she can escape will open soon.

"...What does it matter what my wish was? You are not the incubator I contracted with. It doesn't concern you."

Kyuubey stares at her with his beady red eyes. /Yes, that is true. I assume you will be leaving now?/

Homura looks up into the sky, at the figure of Kriemhild Gretchen bearing down.

Her hand moves, and she fights through the pain as she twists the buckler attached to her arm.

"Goodbye, Madoka. I'm sorry," she whispers softly, right before she activates her magic.

The scenery wavers, and in another moment, she's gone.

Tail swishing, Kyuubey closes his eyes. /Just how strong of a Witch can she make you, Kaname Madoka?/

\\

She's used to this by now.

A light blue corridor with jagged black lines stretching across.

She limps painfully through, footsteps hurried as she needs to keep moving.

It's hard though, and this is maybe the largest set of injuries she has ever carried during one of her resets.

She can hear it, the loud winding of the clock echoing in her ears.

It doesn't take long until she sees it, the door that will bring her to the 'past.'

Heels clicking, she continues pressing forward.

A reminder of Kyuubey's words, and she shakes her head, before she pushes the door open.

There's no hesitation in her steps as she walks.

She will save Madoka.

No matter what.

/

It's when her eyes open, that she knows everything is wrong.

For one thing, it's dark.

It has never been dark when she opens her eyes.

There's a brief moment as she panics; maybe she's dead.

Maybe she failed.

Maybe this is the afterlife.

Except—she can hear herself breathing.

She can feel the air fill her lungs, but there's something strange about it.

Something she can't quite place.

She looks around, hoping to catch a glimpse of her soul gem.

It should be right there when she wakes up.

In her hands, or somewhere nearby.

Nothing.

A bout of frustration, and she slams her hands in front of her.

Pain shoots up her arms at the same time something metal rattles.

Though she tries to fight it, a small whimper escapes her mouth.

She freezes when she hears it—it doesn't sound like her at all.

She sucks in a deep breath, only to release it with a loud yell.

Her voice bounces off around her, echoing loudly in her ears, maybe painfully so.

She doesn't notice.

Her body is shaking.

If she didn't know any better, she sounds like...

She sounds—

There's a click nearby, and suddenly the area is flooded with light.

She winces, eyes closing.

Just as they're opening again, she spots a hand reaching for her.

She tries to press herself back, away from that hand.

"What are you doing, child?" an exasperated voice asks her. "Get out here!"

The hand succeeds, and she's forced out of her dark prison.

She stumbles, feet clumsy, and is seconds away from plummeting forward when someone grabs her.

"Look at your dress! This is the second time this month I need to fix it, Homura!"

There's a familiar lilt in the way her name is spoken. She looks up—and up, and up.

Her eyes widen, and the woman kneels so that she's eye level with her.

"What's wrong? Are you feeling sick again?" the older woman asks, one hand now pressed against her forehead.

"...S-Sister Claire...?"

"No fever, but you do seem a bit pale." Sister Claire sighs. She easily lifts Homura off her feet, settling her against her shoulder. "I'll explain to Mari-san what happened. Let's get you to bed."

Still thoroughly confused, Homura grips onto Sister Claire's dress tightly, her small hands bunching up the black fabric.

Another sigh, and a gentle hand is patting her back. "Shhh, you'll feel better after you get some rest."

She has a higher view as she's being carried, and she feels something catch in her throat as sights she only vaguely remembers pass by her eyes.

A long hallway, with wooden walls and matching wooden floors.

A spiral staircase, that creaks and rings of metal with each footstep.

A room, filled with rows of beds covered with plain blankets and one pillow each.

Sister Clair passes the cracked tile on the floor, before she lowers her to her assigned bed: two down from where the door is.

"There." A hand brushes away her bangs. "We'll need to change your diet as well, Homura. You feel lighter than Kasumi-chan."

She blinks.

"Okay, wait a moment as I get your pajamas. You can lie down, if you want."

She does as told, and watches from her bed as Sister Clair walks to the large closet located in the middle of the room.

She doesn't realize her eyes are closed, until she feels hands pulling her up into a sitting position.

"Raise your arms, Homura."

She mumbles something, suddenly feeling really, really tired.

A sigh, and her arms are lifted without her help.

Her dress is pulled off, and if she was more awake, she'd feel embarrassed that someone is literally stripping her naked.

She's half asleep though at this point, and it isn't long until she's lying on the mattress in her pajamas with a blanket tucked around her.

"Goodnight, Homura," Sister Claire whispers, one hand gently stroking her head.

She murmurs something unintelligible in response as she slowly drifts to sleep.

Sister Claire watches her for another moment, before she finally moves to leave the room.

Another glance, and the door clicks shut behind her.

/

She spends the next few days drowning in confusion; she doesn't believe anything is real.

The workers send her to the isolation ward thinking she's sick again.

Bitter medicine, and tasteless food are her only companions until she finally pretends that she's fine, and they release her back to her room.

She hates it.

She remembers now how much she hated living in the institution.

Almost every moment spent is with someone else.

Her bedroom shared with 7 other people.

Meals in the common room, where the older kids help themselves to her share, and Sister Claire constantly complains how she's losing weight.

No privacy, and baths with other girls her age.

But, above all else, she misses the freedom of being able to wander.

Other than school, and check ups at the hospital, they aren't allowed to step foot outside.

She hates it so, so much.

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She's balancing a tray lined with food, walking carefully, when two older girls pass by.

"Hey, thanks."

One of them snatches the dessert—brownie for today—and the other swipes her drink.

Neither of them look back, and she's left with a permanent frown on her face.

She's older than the both of them—or, technically, she should be—and it's humiliating being reduced back to this state when she has grown up already, a long, long time.

She exhales slowly, thoughts of revenge already passing through her mind.

/

"Stay there, until you learn your place, brat!"

She's shoved roughly into one of the metal lockers, and she doesn't have a chance to even recover before the door slams shut.

She quickly tries to push it open, but judging from how something rattles as she struggles, it sounds like there's something blocking the door.

She slams her fist angrily into the locker, ignoring how her hand twinges with pain.

Frustrated tears gather in her eyes, and she swipes at them with her sleeve.

Her lips tremble, but she grits her teeth.

She refuses to cry.

Not here, and not now.

Two hours, until Sister Claire finally finds her.

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She's never been physically fit, or even healthy for her age, as are half of the other kids here.

It doesn't mean she's disabled, either.

Just that her heart is a bit weaker than normal, and she's unable to do any strenuous activity for too long.

So when they're outside for once, and she's quietly reading a book by one of the large oak trees in front, it surprises everyone when one of the older boys decide to tease her by taking her book away, and she fights back.

Pent up stress at this unfamiliar yet painfully familiar setting breaks something inside her.

When he throws it at another kid, expecting her to follow, she instead builds up momentum and straight out tackles him.

She's smaller than he is, and definitely a lot weaker, so it doesn't take long until he easily shoves her off.

When the workers finally break up the fight, she's already passed out from her injuries.

She's sent to the isolation ward once more, to heal, and for punishment.

The physical pain hurts without magic to offset it, and it reminds her that she's alive; it's not a feeling she likes.

A few of the other kids start looking up to her, and when she's finally released still sporting bandages, her tray during lunch is filled with desserts.

She ignores them though.

She's not here to make friends.

But—she's not exactly sure why she's here, either.

/

There's nightmares that haunt her at night—but it's nothing uncommon.

Plenty of the younger kids still cry, missing their parents, or maybe dreaming about things they don't miss.

Some of the older kids though, tease her.

They find out she's usually calling for 'Madoka,' but there's no one at the institution with that name.

They laugh, and tell her the only person who would be her friend would have to be imaginary.

More fights, and more time spent in isolation.

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Her change in behavior has a few of the workers worried—mostly Sister Claire, since the older woman is her main caretaker.

One day, she's pulled from afternoon recess.

Sister Claire sets her down into one of the large chairs, before taking a seat in front of her.

"Homura," that familiar lilt from her accent, "is... everything alright?"

She stares at Sister Claire.

"You've been acting out lately. Are you upset about something?"

She blinks in response.

"We're here to help you, Homura. If anything is happening to you, you can tell us."

Her words make her want to smile.

She can just picture it—her lips twisting into a sneer, or some form of expression that can somehow show Sister Claire the anguish she's experiencing.

How can she explain that she's a time traveler from the future, stuck somehow in the past, when she's supposed to be out there, saving the lone girl that was (is) her only friend?

She *can't*.

Instead, she remains quiet.

Sister Claire responds the only way she knows how: she reads her passages from the Bible, hoping to comfort her with words of understanding.

It doesn't work, of course.

But she at least pretends to humor her.

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Sometimes, there are volunteers at the institution, and it's the few times there are outsiders that step into their world.

They're temporary though, and most of the kids don't really like them.

If they're going to leave so soon, what's the point in befriending them?

It'll just be another heartache later on, especially if they become attached.

She thought this way as well before, but now... Now, she deliberately seeks them out.

They offer bits and pieces of information that she can't find in this isolated place, and she prefers them instead of the regular workers.

One in particular—another older woman—she finds out she's from Kazamino.

Just hearing the sound of that familiar city makes her heart beat faster.

It's a very, very small thread that reminds her of her future/past, and she clings to her harder than anyone else.

When she leaves after the summer ends, she's crying the most during the farewell party.

/

Fall, and the leaves from the trees start piling up outside.

One day in October, she manages to keep her dessert from dinner.

She finishes her bath earlier than everyone else, and she's the only one in their shared bedroom for a few moments.

The lightly smushed cake wrapped in napkins is pulled out of her dress pockets, and she places it on her bed.

She bows her head.

"Happy Birthday, Madoka," she whispers.

She's able to finish it right before everyone starts filing in.

\

Closer to winter, and there's a cold front in Tokyo.

Snow, and more snow.

They're not allowed play outside, however.

Some of them are here for health reasons, and no one wants to be responsible in case anyone gets sick.

A few days before Christmas, and she's fitted into a new, light purple dress sent to her a week ago.

She's sitting in the front room, waiting and kicking her feet on one of the chairs.

The double doors open, and like all the other children here, she glances over.

In enters a woman with long black hair, new designer clothes, and a fashionable bag clutched at her side.

She stares.

She recognizes her.

She remains seated, and watches as the woman looks around.

Her gaze passes her twice, until Sister Claire steps in, arm gesturing to the seats.

A false smile when she meets her eyes, and with a sigh, she finally hops off the chair.

She brushes down her dress, and slowly approaches the woman who is her mother.

"Look at you, Homura-chan! I knew the dress would go well with your pale complexion," she coos, kneeling slightly to place her gloved hands on her face.

Sister Claire smiles. "Why don't you show your Okaa-san the drawing you drew last week, Homura? The one hanging in the hallway," she suggests.

She doesn't want to, but she nods and starts leading the way.

She remembers always wanting to hold her mother's hand whenever she visited—but she has already stopped lying to herself.

She doesn't care about this woman, just like this woman doesn't care about her.

15 minutes, and a quick tour with empty words, before her mother is once more gone.

Sister Claire kneels besides her as she watches her drive away.

"Homura?"

She used to cry whenever she left, but—

She turns and heads over to the common room without another word.

/

They ring in the new year with osechi and mochi donated from a few local charities.

Everyday she wakes up, hoping that this is a dream.

Everyday she wakes up in that uncomfortable bed with the scratchy blankets, and to other girls her age waking up around her.

She doesn't know if she can continue this for 7 more years, and if Mitakihara is still a future for her.

If she will ever meet Madoka ever again.

Two days after the New Year ends, and once school begins, she remembers something important.

Two older girls disappear without a trace, and she realizes that maybe her becoming a magical girl is no coincidence after all.

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A week later, she's passing by the bedrooms on her way to the kitchens, when she hears something from one of the slightly ajar doors.

She's never looking forward to any of the meals, and she's curious enough that she investigates.

She pushes open the door and it creaks from movement.

She finds one of the older girls that usually steals her food, glaring at her.

"What do you want?"

She doesn't want anything, and merely stands there.

"Get out!" A pillow is thrown her way, and even though she doesn't move, it completely misses her, instead hitting the door as it shakes from impact.

She continues staring, and slowly, the older girl gathers her face in her hands, and sobs.

The two that had disappeared had been her best friends.

And she's all alone now.

She slowly walks over, her oversized shoes clomping as she makes her way to the bed.

She ignores the glare as she approaches.

The bed is taller than hers, and it takes a bit of effort until she's able to sit herself on it.

She stares straight ahead as she pats down the front of her dress.

"...W-What did they wish for?" she asks softly.

The older girl's head snaps up, eyes wide. "What?"

Homura eyes her—a strange sight, because she's a 7 year old that looks like she has seen everything.

"...N-Nevermind." She slowly climbs down, but as soon as her shoes hit the floor, there's a hand on her shoulder.

Just as she's about to move away, that hand pulls her back onto the bed.

"W-What do you know?! H-How do you know?! Y-You're—" A choked sob, and the older girl throws herself on her, crying loudly.

Eventually, the cries stop, and she's finally let go.

Her dress is soaked, and she's at least glad that the laundry has already been done this week; she has an extra set of clothes in her bedroom.

The other girl sniffs. "W-We were supposed to get an apartment together," she whispers. "Because, you know, we're almost old enough to leave..."

She nods slowly.

"K-Karin leaves first, since her birthday is earlier. And she was already searching for cheap housing... s-she even got the director's permission. H-He would sign off as the guarantor... but... l-last year, this family came. We didn't think much of them, because they don't really care about the older kids." She pauses to wipe her eyes. "But... they approached me, last month. Offering to be my foster family..."

She knows Karin, and Karin is... was the leader of their pack.

Territorial, and very possessive.

"K-Karin found out... even though I tried to keep it a secret. L-Last week, after school ended, she dragged me and Megumi to an empty lot, and she made t-this wish... t-that... that the three of us would be together forever..."

She can already imagine how that played out.

"We... were attacked, almost right after. I-It was this... d-dark and twisted looking thing... K-Karin..." her lips tremble as more tears fall. "M-Megumi..." she swallows heavily. "...Megumi saved me... b-but she... she also..."

"I see..."

"W-What do I do...?"

She leans back against her hands, kicking her feet. "...I don't know."

Hands grab her and roughly shove her down. "Tell me what I should do! Tell me!"

She struggles to push her off, but there's a huge difference in their statures. Her arms shake from the exertion, but the other girl holds steadfast.

"I-I should make a wish to bring them back..."

Those eyes aren't even looking at her anymore. Thinking quickly, Homura lifts her leg and kicks her hard in the stomach.

A pained gasp, and she jumps off the bed as the older girl falls to the floor.

Just as she's about to run, there's a loud voice from the doorway.

"What are you two doing? Homura, you skipped dinner again."

Sister Claire pauses, taking one look at Homura's messy appearance, and to the struggling girl on the floor.

She sighs. "Homura, come with me."

She walks over, and with one last look at the still crying girl, she exits the room with Sister Claire holding her hand.

/

She's hiding in her usual locker, when there's a soft knock.

Her head lifts just as the door opens, and her eyes blink from the sudden light.

A shadow passes, and suddenly a familiar face is staring at her.

"...I agreed to go with the foster family," she tells her.

She lowers her head, burying her face back into her knees.

The older girl fidgets nervously. "D-Do you think it was the right thing to do...?"

"Duno..." she mumbles.

A soft laugh in response, a strange twittering sound that speaks of nerves and unease. "T-They seem nice. I-I'll get my own bathroom too..."

She lifts her head once more. "...Did you need something?"

The older girl takes a seat in front of her, not at all caring that her skirt is getting dirty from the dust on the floor. "Y-You know about wishes, and stuff. I don't... have anyone else to talk to..."

There's a weird sense of deja vu that hits her, which is strange, because she has never talked to this girl really, outside from when her friends were stealing her things.

"This... foster family of yours... where do they live?"

"Oh. They're... in Hokkaido, actually. K-Kinda far... but, I've always wanted to go there..."

She raises her head, brows furrowing lightly. "...Why would they come to Tokyo? There are closer ones to their home."

The older girl shrugs. "They had problems, I think. We're in a private institution, so the process is a bit quicker here...?"

She closes her eyes, head falling back to her knees.

"Hey."

She tries her best to ignore the finger poking her.

"Hey."

Eventually, she frowns and sits up.

"You never did explain how you know. D-Did Kyuubey approach you too?"

Just hearing the name has her stiffening. "...He is not something you want to trust."

The older girl nods. "I always felt like he... he was kind of creepy, you know? Cute... but creepy." She shrugs. "Well, t-that's... I don't need

him anymore, since I'll be moving to Hokkaido." She slowly stands. "Anyways, I need to go pack. I'm leaving the day after tomorrow."

She stares at her for a moment. For some reason, something is tugging at the back of her mind—but she can't remember.

"Maybe," the older girl says with a smile, "maybe I'll write to you. Since you know, you have no friends here and all." She dusts off her skirt. "Alright, I'll see you. Bye, Homura. Did you want me to close the door?"

"...Yes."

"'Kay."

The door clicks shut, once again filling her eyesight with darkness.

She listens as footsteps fade away.

A week later, she remembers why the girl was so familiar.

The same things had happened in her original timeline, and just because she had moved to Hokkaido, it didn't mean she was safe.

Karin's wish was still there, and she also disappears shortly after.

Now though, Homura understands what had really happened.

\\

It's a strange existence, and by now, most of the workers and the other kids are used to the 'new' her by now.

She's still quiet, that hasn't changed much.

She is no longer a crybaby outside of her nightmares however, and sometimes the older kids make it their goal to get some kind of reaction from her.

But, she is not the same girl that grew up here, lifetimes ago.

And she'll make sure they understand that.

By the time she's 8, most of the children avoid her.

And she wouldn't have had it any other way.

/

The days pass with the same boring routine.

Breakfast, school.

Lunch, recess.

Homework, dinner.

And occasional activities in between.

Her locker is growing smaller, or maybe she's the one growing. She can most likely still fit inside there until next year.

After that, she'll need to find some place else to hide.

Another year older.

Another dress from her mother.

Another year bringing her closer to Madoka.

Another—

\\

It's when she's 10, that her vision slowly starts getting blurry.

She notices it in school, when they change seats after winter break.

The notes on the board are barely visibly, and no matter how much she squints, or rubs her eyes, the words never seem to clear.

The teacher sends her home with a sheet of paper one day, and she presents it to Sister Claire.

"I'll set an appointment," she tells her, frowning at the note.

She chooses frames that are pink instead of red.

Sister Claire asks her again if she really wants those, and there's no hesitance at all as she nods.

A few of the girls in her class make fun of her, and she makes sure to leave the glasses inside their case before she goes after them.

No one makes fun of them afterwards, and some of them give her wary compliments.

She doesn't care—she's not fishing for those.

What she wants, is a reminder that the future is still here, and that that future is still Madoka.

/

Her health is slowly getting worse, and when she reaches 11, she's taking medicine to control her irregular heartbeats.

She's staying at the hospital more often for observation, to make sure her heart isn't going to stop one day.

She knows it'll be soon when they'll start suggesting permanent residency at the hospital.

One of the places will be Mitakihara—because any city that isn't Tokyo is cheaper.

When her mother comes in for her annual visits while she's lying in bed, she asks her what she wants this year.

"It can be anything, Homura-chan! A new dress, maybe make-up, if you'd like. Or shoes. Anything!"

Originally, she had looked at her mother with wide eyes, and had asked again if 'anything' really meant 'anything.'

"Yes! Of course! Just tell Okaa-san, and she will buy it for you!"

She won't make the same mistake this time.

She won't ask to live with her.

"I want... to go to Mitakihara," she responds.

Her mother blinks. "Mitakihara? Why would you want to go there for, Homura-chan?"

Wordlessly, she slides a pamphlet in her direction, titled 'Mitakihara General Hospital.'

"I want to get better, and live there." Her mother is flipping through the papers, when she places a hand on hers. "I don't want to live here anymore, Okaa-san. Can I get your permission to live alone, in Mitakihara?"

"Homura-chan..." Her mother stares at her. "A-Are you sure this is what you want?"

She nods. "Yes, I'm sure."

Her mother is used to the hesitant Homura, the one that constantly seeks reassurance.

She doesn't recognize this girl in front of her.

"It... you are alright with living alone?"

Another nod. "It's better than here, Okaa-san. There's... There's no privacy here. I can't—I can't even get five minutes alone to think." She doesn't fit inside the locker anymore. "And it won't be immediate. I'll be in the hospital for a while, so I won't be alone until I get better."

Her mother is very close to caving in—her moving meant she is no longer obligated to visit every year.

At least in her eyes.

"...Please, Okaa-san?"

Her mother sighs. To Homura's surprise, she reaches out and cups her cheek with her hand. "You've grown, haven't you, Homura-chan...? I'll—discuss things with your father. Get the medical bills sorted out, as well as possible residency in Mitakihara."

She can't help it, her lips twitch into a small smile.

"Mitakihara, huh?" her mother says as she removes her hand and returns to the pamphlet. "It's a fairly new city, from what I remember. Maybe I'll drop by, while you're there."

She doesn't reply, instead settling back into her bed.

Almost 2 years early into Mitakihara.

That, is definitely better than another repeated month.

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Arrangements are made, and her aunt that lives two cities over is granted temporary guardianship of her until she's 15—long enough that should any complications occur, she'll be able to make any decisions concerning her health.

Her spot in the institution is filled up as soon as the papers are filed; she has no choice now, she can no longer return, but she doesn't mind.

Once the weather clears, Sister Claire follows her to Mitakihara, the only company she has as they take the train, and then a taxi further into the city.

They're crossing the bridge, when they hit a line of traffic.

"Is this a usual occurrence at this time?" Sister Claire asks the driver.

He shakes his head. "There was an accident a few days ago. They're still investigating the cause, so a few lanes are closed until next week. It'll clear up once we pass the bridge."

Homura frowns. "...Was anyone hurt?"

"Ah. Yeah. One family. The parents died, but their daughter survived."

"Oh, how unfortunate." Sister Claire bows her head, offering prayers to the victims.

Homura stares out the window, into the river below.

Mami... is definitely a magical girl.

She's not sure when Kyouko will contract, but she has a feeling she wouldn't be able to change that, either.

/

They're an hour late for their appointment, but Sister Claire had already called the hospital to inform them of the delay.

She has her own room here, much like the one she usually wakes up to.

It's in a different section though, and her window doesn't have as clear view of the river as her old one.

She doesn't care.

She changes into her pajamas, and Sister Claire helps her into the bed.

The blankets are tucked around her, and she finds it strange to be here.

Sister Claire is older than she remembers, with more prominent wrinkles on her face.

"Homura." Still that same accent though.

"Yes, Sister Claire?"

Sister Claire pulls up a chair next to the bed, and takes a seat. "I was surprised when I heard that you were the one who suggested this hospital. I was sure that you would choose something closer to Tokyo."

She stares.

Originally, she had. Refusing to part with Tokyo and her ties with her mother.

Sister Claire smiles. "But, you haven't really been meeting my expectations for a while now, have you?" She sighs. "Homura, I'm glad that you took the initiative. It won't be easy, but I'm sure you can handle it. From what I can tell, this city seems nice." She pats her

hand. "When you're all healed up, you can apply to attend Middle School. It's close enough to the hospital as well, in case anything happens. Homura..."

"Yes, Sister Claire?"

"...I know this is sudden, but, I'm going home in another week. Back to England."

Homura blinks.

Sister Claire pats her hand again. "I'm getting old, and so are my parents. I promised myself that I would return, once you left the institution. Now, don't look at me like that. I have been caring for you ever since you set foot inside that building. You are the last in my care, and I know that children need stability."

The guilt she feels—from forgetting about this kind woman in her original timeline comes back tenfold.

"Oh, don't cry, child. Shhh." Sister Claire reaches up to stroke her head. "Listen, things will be different here, Homura. You'll get better, and then you'll go to school, where you'll meet other children your age. You'll find a best friend and she won't tease you, just because you were brought up differently. She won't care, and she'll see what a kind, and sweet child you are."

To her embarrassment, it makes her cry harder. Sister Claire gathers her in her arms like she used to, and holds her close.

It's most likely the last time she'll ever see her, and she clings to her harder.

The next day, Sister Claire is back on that train to Tokyo, and she's on the road to her slow recovery.

\\

She doesn't realize how much she misses it—the hospital.

No more shared meals, shared rooms, shared baths.

She can finally hear herself think, and she can finally plan.

But—

She doesn't even know if Madoka exists here.

If she even has a purpose at all.

/

It takes her a week to figure out the routines, and to figure out when the best time to sneak out is.

Thankfully, she's allowed to wander the hospital as long as she informs the floor nurse where she's going.

When the weather on a Sunday afternoon is nice and warm, she shuffles out of her room with the side bag Sister Claire had gifted her, the inside stuffed with a change of clothes and her medicine.

The nurse eyes her outdoor shoes suspiciously, but she tells her she's going to find a quiet place to read outside.

It's busy enough that she agrees, and as soon as her back is turned, she heads straight for one of the side doors that lead to the garden.

This path has the least amount of security cameras, and she has the unmonitored areas memorized; she knows security is only upgraded when there's a breach, and even two years from now, things will be the same.

A few people give her curious looks as she walks down the street, but she ignores them and ducks into the first public restroom she sees.

She shuts the stall with a click, and changes into the dress given to her by her mother last year.

It still fits perfectly, as she hasn't grown much since then.

She exits with her pajamas now in her bag, looking like a normal girl out on a stroll.

She wants—she wants to find Madoka.

There's no guarantee she'll be home, however, not to mention she wouldn't be able to check inside if she was.

She has two hours though, and it's the first bit of freedom tasted in years.

She passes a park, and after a brief debate, she takes a seat at one of the empty benches.

There are children younger than her, running and playing in the playground.

Maybe some of them her age—physically, but not mentally.

Her shoulders slowly slouch.

It's not quiet—but it's peaceful.

Voices shouting in the background, but they're not jarring, not like inside the institution.

A slight breeze, and the sight of green all around her.

It feels...

Surreal.

The years have passed, and now as she sits right at the cusp of her determining if she has a purpose, she finds herself lost.

Not once has she seen Kyuubey since then.

Even with more random disappearances at the institution.

At what age does she qualify for a wish?

Or, is it because she herself at this moment, does not actually have a need for one?

She lowers her face into her hands.

She's—

She's miserable, and being miserable by itself won't grant her any wishes.

She sucks in a deep breath, refusing to cry.

The only thing she can do right now is to try and find Madoka.

And whatever happens after, will happen.

She lifts her head, hands moving to brush those few tears away.

She's accomplishing nothing by being here.

Moving to stand, something catches her eye, and she freezes, still half out of her seat.

Coincidence, or maybe not, there's pink that she recognizes oh so well.

Unconsciously she stands, gaze following a girl as she walks through the park.

She's smaller, younger.

But definitely Madoka.

It's then that she notices a younger version of Miki Sayaka in front of her, hair still cut in that same asymmetrical bob.

Two familiar faces.

She watches as Sayaka turns to Madoka, a wide grin as she says something.

Shy as ever, Madoka averts her eyes, and says something back.

A laugh from Sayaka, and a smile from Madoka.

She doesn't know what she's feeling, but she's not as happy as she thought she would be.

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They remain in the park, and she remains staring.

12, and they're still young enough to play tag with the other children.

She's watching Madoka, watching as she laughs and giggles with everyone else.

Madoka suddenly looks up, only to lock gazes with lavender.

She blinks, but one of the other kids tag her, and she's now it.

She pouts, and starts chasing after someone else.

On her bench, Homura breathes a sigh of relief.

She pats her dress, and decides that maybe she should leave.

Madoka—doesn't know her.

She's happy, and she's enjoying her life.

Someone like her would only drag her down.

She stands, moving to retrieve her bag, when a hand grabs her arm.

She turns, only to find Miki Sayaka glaring at her.

"You have some kind of problem with Madoka?" she demands loudly.

"S-Sayaka-chan! I-It's okay..." That familiar voice.

She's supposed to be stronger now—she hasn't been a child for a long time.

But—her breath hitches, and to her embarrassment she finds herself crying.

Sayaka quickly lets go. "H-Hey! I-I didn't do anything!" She turns to Madoka in panic. "I-It wasn't me!"

Madoka flounders about. She reaches into her skirt pocket to pull out her handkerchief. "U-Uhm." She glances around nervously, before she steps closer.

Still shy, yet kind, Madoka hesitantly puts her hands on her shoulders.

"I-It's okay. D-Don't cry! Sayaka-chan was just being overprotective! I'm sorry, p-please stop crying!"

Just hearing her voice does little to help, and the tears continue to fall.

Madoka and Sayaka exchange looks.

"U-Uhm." Thinking quickly Madoka hugs her close. "I-It's okay. D-Don't cry. Shhh, d-don't cry."

She's speaking to her like how someone would speak to a younger child.

She should be offended, because she's not a child.

Instead, her arms reach up and she buries her face in Madoka's shoulder.

She feels her stiffen, right before there's a hand stroking her head.

"I-It's okay. W-Whatever it is, will be okay."

/

She's burning with embarrassment as she quietly sits on the bench, hands wrapped around the bottle of juice Madoka had bought for her.

She can't even pay her back for it—she doesn't have an allowance yet, not even one yen to her name.

It makes her want to bury herself in shame, but she just continues sitting there, quietly.

Madoka is sitting next to her, still nervously smiling.

Enough time has been wasted, that she knows she needs to return to the hospital soon, before she gets in trouble.

She sighs softly, eyes closing.

"U-Uhm."

She opens her puffy eyes and turns to Madoka.

"A-Are you okay now?" Madoka asks, giving her a kind smile.

She nods slowly. "Y—" she clears her throat. "Y-Yes... I apologize..." She bows her head, hands gripping the bottle. "I-I don't have any money..."

"Oh!" Madoka shakes her head, hands held up. "T-That's okay! Y-You can have it!"

Her forehead rests on the cap of the bottle. "I-I'm sorry..."

A loud sigh besides them.

Madoka turns to Sayaka who's sitting next to her.

"Okay, we get it already. How 'bout just saying 'thank you' and leaving it at that?" Sayaka tells her.

Madoka frowns. "S-Sayaka-chan!"

"...thank you," she mumbles.

"Ahh." Madoka turns back to her. "Uhm... y-you're welcome. I'm-I'm Kaname Madoka, by the way. W-What's your name? I-If you don't mind me asking...?"

A long pause. "...Akemi Homura."

"Homura?" Madoka repeats. "Then, Homura-chan!"

She swallows heavily, throat feeling dry all of a sudden. She lifts her head, and shaking hands fail at twisting the bottle open.

"U-Uhm, l-let me see that for a moment, Homura-chan?"

Small hands gently pry the bottle from her grip, and she hears the sound as plastic shifts, the audibly click signaling it's open.

Madoka twists the cap off, and holds out the bottle. "H-Here you go!" she says with a smile.

More embarrassment. "T-Thank you..." she whispers, accepting it.

She glances at Madoka, and sensing her nerves, Madoka looks away to stare straight ahead.

She takes a sip—it's sweet, and nothing like the watered down drinks she's now used to.

Madoka's eyes dart to her, and when she notices she's stopped drinking, she turns to face her. The cap is offered, and it's twisted back on.

"A-Are you feeling better now, Homura-chan?"

A hesitant nod.

Sayaka leans forward in her seat. "So, why were you crying?"

As brash as ever.

Madoka frowns at her. "S-Sayaka-chan!"

"What! Don't tell me you're not curious too, Madoka!"

Madoka looks away. "W-Well.." Another nervous glance over to Homura. "U-Uhm. I like your glasses, Homura-chan!"

The same pink frames are sitting on her face; she needs to replace them soon.

"T-Thank you..."

Madoka smiles. "Do you like pink? It's one of my favourite colours! But lately I've been liking white too."

She mumbles something, fingers fidgeting with the wrapper around the bottle.

Sayaka hops off the bench and moves to stand in front of the two. "Madoka, I'm going to go play. We only got to play a little bit."

"Ahh." Madoka glances over to Sayaka, before turning back to Homura. "U-Uhm. H-Homura-chan, do you want to play too?"

She shakes her head.

Madoka's face falls.

Homura tries to reassure her. "N-No. I... uhm. I-I need to go..."

"So soon?" Madoka looks equally disappointed.

She bows her head. "Y-Yes..." She looks around. "U-Uhm... d-do you know what time it is...?"

Madoka blinks. "Sayaka-chan?"

"Uh huh?" She's facing away from them, looking bored as she waits for Madoka to finish.

"What time is it?"

Sayaka has a small watch on her left wrist, and she looks down. "4:31."

Homura jumps out of her seat. She's beyond late. "I-I need to go," she tells them, slightly panicking.

She doesn't want them to take away her privileges; the thought only serves to make her move faster.

Just as she reaches for her bag, her vision spins. She wavers on her feet, dizziness suddenly overtaking her.

"H-Homura-chan? Are you okay?"

She can vaguely hear Madoka's voice, before she pitches forward.

"Homura-chan!"

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There's something cool on her forehead, and something soft underneath her.

Her eyes slowly focus, and the first thing she sees is blurry pink.

"...Madoka...?"

A sigh of relief. "You're awake, Homura-chan! Are you alright?"

Confusion as her vision slightly clears, because the Madoka peering over her doesn't look like the Madoka she knows.

A smaller face, though her hair is tied up in those familiar pigtails.

"Is she alright?" Another familiar voice.

"U-Uhm. I'm not sure... Homura-chan...?" A hand waves in front of her face.

Another second, before the years come crashing down as she remembers.

She moves to sit up, but her vision spins again, and there's hands on her shoulders, pressing her back down.

"Y-You should lie down a bit longer, Homura-chan."

She raises a hand to her forehead, eyes now closed as she tries to will the dizziness away. Her hand knocks into the damp cloth, and Madoka collects it before it falls.

She ignores it, slowly backtracking what had happened. The park. Madoka and Sayaka. Sneaking out of the hospital—

She groans.

"Homura-chan?"

"W-What time is it...?" she mumbles.

"Uhm."

"4:45," Sayaka answers.

She presses her palms into her eyes. She's definitely late now.

"Homura-chan...?"

She pauses. For a while now, she has noticed that Madoka's voice is above her.

Not to mention—where are her glasses?

She opens her eyes, squinting slightly at the brightness.

"Glasses...?"

"Oh! Uhm..." She feels movement underneath her as Madoka shifts. "Didn't want them accidentally getting scratched or anything," Madoka tells her, slipping the frames back onto her face.

She stares up at the younger Madoka. A turn of her head, and there's fabric in her eyesight.

She blushes as she finally realizes that she's lying with her head in Madoka's lap.

Once again, she moves to sit up, this time more slowly. To her relief, nothing spins, and she manages to sit upright against the bench.

She bows her head, eyes darting to Madoka. "S-Sorry," she mumbles, hands moving unconsciously to fix her hair.

"A-Ah." Madoka shakes her head, her own face flushing slightly. "I-It's alright. The bench didn't seem very comfortable... so... I-It's fine."

She nods slowly. "T-Thank you... U-Uhm. I-I need to go..." she says softly.

Sayaka stares at her. "You said that a few times already."

"Sayaka-chan." Madoka turns to Homura. "Uhm, is it alright, if I walk with you?"

She blinks.

"U-Uhm." Madoka holds out her hands. "I-It's, you know, j-just in case...?"

She glances down. "U-Uhm. T-The..."

Sayaka sighs. "Yeah, we'll walk you back. We have to go home soon, anyways."

"Sayaka-chan." Madoka gives her a smile.

"U-Uhm..."

Madoka reaches out to grab her hand. "Come on, Homura-chan."

She finds herself blushing at the contact as Madoka helps her up.

/

The closer they get to the hospital, the more she's dragging her feet.

It's not like she's trying to hide that she's sick—they obviously knew something was wrong with her the moment she passed out.

But—

She's also not looking forward to the reprimand.

They pass by another public restroom—the last one on the way, and she stops walking.

Busy chatting with Sayaka, it takes a moment until Madoka finally notices she's no longer walking besides them.

She looks around, finding her behind them. "Homura-chan?"

"U-Uhm... I-I need to use the restroom..." she says softly, hands holding onto her bag tightly.

"Okay, we'll wait," Madoka tells her with a kind smile.

Sayaka sighs, but she nods as well.

She enters, and she's still trying to think of an excuse even when she exits the bathroom dressed in her pajamas.

Sayaka and Madoka both blink at her.

She nervously averts her eyes. "T-The, uhm... I c-can walk back by myself... now..."

"Wait." Sayaka frowns at her. "Did you sneak out of your house, or something?"

She shakes her head. "N-No..." Technically, it's true.

The hospital isn't her house.

Sensing Sayaka's stubbornness is going to cause problems, Madoka quickly steps in. "Sayaka-chan."

Sayaka crosses her arms and faces Homura. "I'm not going to let you go until you answer."

"S-Sayaka-chan!"

Sayaka stares.

She sighs softly. "I-I snuck out of the hospital."

"Is that why you passed out?" Sayaka asks.

Madoka pinches her side. "Sayaka-chan! That's not nice!"

Sayaka yelps. "Ow, Madoka!"

Madoka turns to Homura. "S-Sorry Homura-chan. Sayaka-chan sometimes speaks her mind too much." She throws her a glare, which looks adorable on her young face.

She shakes her head. "I-It... t-the..."

Madoka holds out her hands. "It's okay, Homura-chan. You don't need to explain anything. B-But, uhm, y-you probably shouldn't sneak out of the hospital... if it's so serious...?"

She glances down to the floor.

"Uhm, that is!" Madoka grabs her hand. "I-I mean, uhm, instead of you s-sneaking out, w-we'll come visit you! At the hospital!"

She blinks.

Madoka nods eagerly. "You're at Mitakihara General Hospital, right? Can I have your room number? I'll visit! For sure!"

In a way, she's not surprised—because Madoka is still Madoka, even if she's years younger.

"7C..." she mumbles in response.

Madoka smiles, and lets go of her hand. "Okay. I promise I'll visit you, Homura-chan! You should probably get back now."

She nods, eyes shifting nervously from the floor to Madoka. "...T-Thank you."

Another beaming smile. "Take care, Homura-chan! We'll see you soon!"

She shyly waves, before she starts walking away.

"Homura-chan!"

Her steps pause, and she turns around to find Madoka waving.

"It was nice meeting you, Homura-chan! Take care, okay!"

A small smile on her lips, and she waves once more.

When she returns to the hospital, she's not allowed to leave her room for two weeks as per her Aunt's instructions.

But—

Remembering her encounter with Madoka makes it worth it.

/

She's looking forward to her visit—how can she not be?

She's been waiting this long to see her again that she wants to see her every day.

But days pass, until finally it's a week, and still no sign of Madoka.

She hasn't felt pain like this in a while—maybe she really has no purpose to be here after all.

\

She's listlessly poking through the meal that should be her lunch, when there's a polite knock by the entrance.

Which is strange, because the door is never closed.

She turns, and when she spots that familiar head of pink hair, her heart thuds painfully in her chest.

"Excuse me...? Is..." Madoka smiles when she spots Homura on the bed. "Homura-chan!" She quickly enters.

"Ma—uhm... Kaname-san...?"

Madoka walks closer, stopping when she's right beside her bed. "Madoka is fine, Homura-chan!"

Homura is still staring. "Y-You really came...?"

Madoka presents her a small bouquet of flowers hidden behind her back. "Yes! Of course I did! I said so!" She places the flowers on the small desk besides her bed. "Ehehe, actually," Madoka gives her a sheepish smile, "I visited earlier in the week, but... the room number you gave me, there was this old man in there...?"

She blinks. She wants to hit herself, she had given Madoka her old room number.

"A-And I was too shy to ask the receptionist..." Madoka continues, "I-I'm sorry, that it took me so long to visit."

She quickly shakes her head. "N-No! N-No... t-thank you... f-for coming..."

Madoka looks at her, before giving her a smile. "Of course! What are friends for?"

Friends.

To be friends with Madoka again.

The thought makes her want to cry.

"Homura-ch—oh, you have a visitor today?"

They both turn as one of the floor nurses enter.

"H-Hello," Madoka murmurs, bowing her head lightly.

"Hello," the nurse replies with a friendly smile. "I won't bother you for too long—I'm just here to make sure that Homura-chan is eating."

Homura glances down to her mostly untouched lunch.

The nurse gives her a pointed look. "I expect most of that to be gone when I come back again, Homura-chan."

She doesn't respond.

"Which will be in 30 minutes. The faster you finish, the more time you will have to spend with your friend."

She mumbles something.

The nurse turns to Madoka. "Can you at least make sure she doesn't try and throw it away in the trash again?"

Homura blushes, fidgeting with her blanket.

Madoka blinks. "U-Uhm, y-yes." She throws Homura a frown. "I-I'll make sure she eats most of it."

The nurse smiles. "Maybe you could visit more often. I'll leave you two alone. 30 minutes, Homura-chan."

She disappears out the door.

Homura nervously looks to Madoka.

And she's not disappointed to see the disapproving look on her face.

"You should eat, Homura-chan," Madoka scolds her.

"N-Not hungry," she mumbles.

Madoka crosses her arms across her chest. "I-If you don't eat... I'll... I'll leave."

Homura's head snaps up, tears already gathering in her eyes.

"Ah." Madoka is surprised at her reaction and immediately tries to calm her down. "I-I was just kidding, Homura-chan! I won't, I won't leave! At least, not for a while."

She wipes at her eyes, embarrassed.

"...You should eat though, Homura-chan," Madoka tells her. "I'll—I'll still be here. I'll keep you company while you eat. Food always taste better when you're with a friend."

That word again.

Homura nods slowly. "Y-You can use t-that chair," she says softly, pointing to the far wall.

Madoka smiles. "Be right back!"

The sight of Madoka dragging something almost the same size as her makes her want to smile as well.

"There!" Madoka readjusts the chair, pushing it close enough to the bed as possible, before she takes a seat. "Your turn, Homura-chan."

She glances down to her food, and the look on her face makes Madoka laugh.

"I-Is it that bad?" she asks, curious.

Homura scoops a bit of the mashed potatoes with the fork, and holds it out.

Madoka blinks. She had asked though, and she leans forward, letting Homura feed her.

It's dry and powdery.

She makes a face.

Homura smiles slightly. "I-It's a bit better than what they served at the institution though..."

Madoka wants to spit it out, but Homura's words make her pause.

The smile drops from Homura's face when she realizes what she said. "U-Uhm..."

Madoka barely manages to swallow it, shivering at the taste that lingers in her mouth. "I-If this is better, I don't want to know what the other things you've eaten tastes like."

Homura glances down, remembering Sister Claire's words.

Madoka... never did care.

There's a hand on hers, and she looks up to see Madoka smiling. "...You still have to eat it though, Homura-chan."

She makes another face, and Madoka grins in response.

She manages to eat a little more than half, which is better than what she has eaten all this week.

When the nurse comes back in to check on them, she jokingly asks Madoka to come visit more often.

Madoka is serious though, when she tells her she definitely will.

\\

True to her word, Madoka visits whenever possible.

Sometimes, Sayaka joins her.

And with no threats of turning into Witches or any knowledge of magical girls, for the most part, they get along.

She realizes though, it's because Sayaka pities her.

In her original timeline, and the many ones after, she had already been released from the hospital, and therefore she was already 'recovering.'

Here, she is still sick, and she can see how it affects how Sayaka sees her.

She's just a pitiful girl with no friends, and no family, stuck in the hospital.

And Sayaka-who is kind, but not kind like how Madoka is-feels like it would be wrong to be jealous of this girl who has so much less than her.

Sometimes, Sayaka's smiles are strained-and sometimes, she catches her looking bored when she visits.

Homura's tempted to tell her to just not come, but Madoka would be upset, so she ignores it.

Sayaka's the kind of person that would benefit from age, so she's not surprised that a Sayaka that is younger would be harder to get along with.

/

Lately, her medicine hasn't been working as well. The increased dosage makes her tired, and half the time, Madoka has to leave early because she ends up falling asleep.

She hates how she's not able to keep Madoka company when she visits, and she stubbornly tries to remain awake.

Madoka smiles at her though, as she has already figured out her weakness.

A comforting hand on her head, and a soft hum in her ear could send her to sleep within minutes.

Madoka's discovery had been on accident.

It had been a warm day, and she had had trouble sleeping the night before after waking to pain in her chest.

Madoka's school was holding a festival soon, and her class had signed up to perform a few songs.

Unable to attend, she had asked to hear, and though embarrassed, Madoka had complied.

A few verses in, and her eyes were already drooping. By the time the song ended, she was already asleep.

She had apologized profusely when Madoka came back the next day, but she had merely laughed, obviously greatly amused.

Now, as she struggles to keep her eyes open, Madoka is humming random keys, hands absently stroking her head.

A minute later, and her breathing is relaxed.

"Sleep well, Homura-chan." Madoka smiles down at her.

The only time Homura looks at ease is when she's sleeping, and Madoka vows to make her smile more often.

Her hand is gentle as she runs it through her hair, and her actions earn her a soft sigh from the sleeping girl.

Just as Madoka moves to pull her hand away, she hears Homura murmur her name, and watches as a lone tear trails down her cheek.

It makes her frown.

She leans in close. "Shh, it's okay, Homura-chan. I'm here. Go to sleep, okay?"

A sound from her throat of discontent.

"Shh," Madoka whispers softly. "Sleep, Homura-chan. I'm here, okay?"

She starts humming again, and slowly that crinkle between Homura's eyebrows relax.

Madoka stays besides her for a few more minutes, until she's sure she has fallen asleep, before she pulls away.

She's careful as she collects her things, and with one last look at Homura, she exits the room.

\\

Change in medication brings along other side effects, and lately she's been losing weight due to loss of appetite.

There's an IV in her room now, and she's already feeling a bit under the weather when Madoka comes to visit.

Normally, she would welcome her, but Sayaka enters right after, and she feels her mood plummet.

They still don't really get along, and Madoka either ignores it, or wants to believe that them spending enough time together will bring about friendship, somehow.

"Hi, Homura-chan," Madoka says, approaching her with a smile. "How are you feeling today?"

"...O-Okay," she lies. "How are you, Madoka?"

"Okay, too," she replies, still smiling.

"Yo, Homura," Sayaka greets her with a hand held up.

"...Miki-san."

Sayaka sighs. "How many times do I need to tell you that Sayaka is fine? You seem to have no trouble calling Madoka by her first name. What's with this glaring difference of favouritism?"

"S-Sayaka-chan..."

"It's true!"

Her throat feels dry, and she moves to sit up.

"Ah." Madoka turns back to her. "Did you need something, Homura-chan?"

She hesitates. Her arms feel like lead though.

"W-Water..."

Madoka quickly moves to pour her a cup from a pitcher set besides her table.

Homura can feel Sayaka's eyes burning into her, but she ignores it as Madoka helps her sit up.

"Here you go, Homura-chan," Madoka tells her, handing her the cup.

"T-Thank you..."

She has to hold it in both her hands, and it shakes as she brings it close to her lips.

The water feels nice though, and she finishes it all.

Madoka is already pulling the cup away as soon as the last drop is gone.

"T-Thank you..." she repeats once more as she settles back into her pillows. "W-What did you do today, Madoka?"

Madoka smiles. "Let me get a chair, Homura-chan, and I'll tell you all about it."

She nods sleepily.

Sayaka disappears shortly after, which has been happening recently.

She doesn't mind.

She prefers when it's just her and Madoka.

And even though it might be her own delusions, she wants to believe that Madoka thinks the sam**e.**

AN: To be continued. In case you were curious.